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## Abuse affects fewer Wayne Co. kids

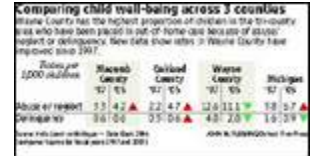
Data show dip in figure from 1997

**BY AMBER HUNT**  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

December 12, 2006

Across Michigan, more children were taken away from their homes last year because of abuse or neglect than eight years ago. And fewer children were taken away because they were delinquent.

But while those trends prove true in nearly every one of the state's 83 counties, one in metro Detroit is bucking it: Wayne County.



According to information released today by Kids Count in Michigan, an annual data book that features profiles of child well-being across the state, Wayne County -- and Detroit, which is analyzed separately -- saw slight decreases in the number of children taken out of their homes because of abuse or neglect, dropping from about 13 to 11 per 1,000 for the county and from about six to nearly five per 1,000 for Detroit.

Statewide, the number of kids taken from homes because of delinquent behavior dropped 43% between 1997 and 2005. That statistic wasn't reflected in Macomb and Oakland counties -- which stayed about the same in the eight-year span. By contrast, Wayne County's number was cut in half: Two of every 1,000 kids were taken out of their homes and placed in either foster care or with relatives because of bad behavior in 2005, compared with four in 1997.

And in Detroit, the rate dropped from about five per 1,000 kids to just under three.

Kathryne O'Grady, director of policy resource development of the Wayne County Department of Children and Family Services, said there's a reason for this shift in numbers: Wayne County's Family-to-Family program run by the state's Department of Human Services.

The pilot program is being rolled out slowly across the state; three Detroit ZIP codes first tested it in 2001. It was countywide by 2005.

Family to Family focuses on intervening when a child is flagged for possibly being removed from his or her home for abuse or neglect.

"They draw everyone to the table as quickly as possible," O'Grady said. "They provide support, bring in the parents, bring in ministers, anyone the child has contact with, and come up with a workable plan that can prevent removing the child."

But the statistic surprised Judi Bradley-Parsons, 48, of Wayne County who has adopted 10 foster children. In about 30 years as a foster parent, all but one of the children she has taken in was abused or neglected.

The exception, she said, was a 14-year-old girl -- now 37 -- who was taken from her biological parents' home for behavioral problems.

"My most recent children were taken at birth because their mother was a drug user," she said. "I know things have gotten worse out there."

She said she hopes the Kids Count statistics in Wayne County are true -- but she's skeptical.

"I'm surprised and I'm thinking they're missing things," she said, "or maybe they're not removing the kid and they should. "I would like to think that it's dropped, but I don't think so."

Wayne County still ranks well above the state rate of about seven children per 1,000 being removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect.

The bulk of the Kids Count study was bleak:

- Statewide, nearly two out of five children lived at or near the poverty level in 2005.
- The number of children receiving food stamps nearly doubled between 2000 and 2005.

## Abuse affects fewer Wayne Co. kids

- About 11 children per 1,000 were victims of maltreatment -- compared with about eight children per 1,000 in 1997.
- Slightly more than 30% of Michigan's children were insured by Medicaid in 2005, compared with about 20% in 1999.

Michigan's staggering economy bears much of the blame, said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, senior research associate for the Michigan League for Human Services, which released the survey.

"Physical neglect makes up the largest share" of kids removed from homes who fall under the "abused or neglected" category, Zehnder-Merrell said Monday. "And the terrible truth is that poverty is playing a big role.

"Parents are overwhelmed. They turn to substance abuse or don't do a very good job of parenting. They just sort of give up."

Nearly 14% of the state's children lived in poverty in 2003, the most recent data available, according to the Kids Count study. Macomb and Oakland counties are lower than the state average, at 8.5% and 7.3%, respectively.

Wayne County ranks significantly higher at 21.2%, though that represents a drop from 25.9% in 1997.

Debbie Kline, executive director of the Association for Children for Enforcement of Support based in Ohio, agreed that poverty can lead to abuse and neglect, but she said the Kids Count statistics don't take into account parents -- usually single mothers -- who sometimes give their children to their parents to ensure their kids can eat.

"There is no reporting column for that," she said. "If it came down to my child eating and my child going hungry, I'd give my child to my parents."

The fact that more children get food stamps and are insured by Medicaid "illustrates the point that we're living in the times of the working poor," she added.

*The Kids Count in Michigan Data Book 2006 is available online at [www.milhs.org](http://www.milhs.org). Contact **AMBER HUNT** at 313-222-2708 or [alhunt@freepress.com](mailto:alhunt@freepress.com).*

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December 12, 2006

## More kids are abused, poor

Report shows Michigan's neglect cases rose between 1997 and 2005; experts blame it on weak economy.

**Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News**

Michigan's children are sinking deeper into poverty and more are landing in foster care as the economy continues to falter and the state has cut or frozen services that support children, according to two reports this week.

The number of abused and neglected children rose between 1997 and 2005, the most significant category of decline in the latest Kids Count in Michigan report that was released today.

The growth in abuse and neglect cases -- from 22,000 cases in 1997 to 29,500 in 2005 -- did not come from brutal abuse cases, such as the high-profile Ricky Holland case. Most of the growth occurred when parents failed to provide for their child's basic needs, such as food and clothing.

Researchers linked child neglect to poverty, which in Michigan has steadily increased every year since 1999. Last year 623,000 -- or two out of five -- school-age children were from families with income below or near the poverty level, according to the Kids Count report.

Nearly 860,000 children -- one out of three -- relied on Medicaid, the public health insurance for the poor. And the percentage of children in the food assistance program doubled between 2000 and 2005, from 278,939 to 513,651 children.

"It's no mystery that the economy is bad and children are in poverty," said Michele Corey, director of community advocacy for Michigan's Children, which collaborates on the annual Kids Count report that measures factors of children's well-being. "This economic situation is intricately tied to other issues. There is such an enormous tie to child neglect."

In 1997, 15,083 Michigan children were neglect victims but the number increased to 22,393 in 2005.

The report points to an erosion of state services and programs that could help struggling families meet their children's basic needs and avoid the foster care system, where neglected children are placed.

Among them is the state's subsidy that helps low-income parents pay for child care while they are working. That subsidy, which is based on the child's age, location and type of child care, was strengthened in the mid-1990s when federal law began requiring welfare recipients to work. But Michigan, along with Oregon, is the only state in the nation that has not increased the child care subsidy in a decade.

Also, Michigan families seeking cash assistance must fall well below the federal poverty line, meaning children in families can be poor by federal standards but still not be able to get state help to pay for basic needs, according to Jane Zehnder-Merrell, project director of the Kids Count report.

For instance, a family of three in Michigan can only earn \$811 a month to qualify for cash assistance, while federal poverty level for a family of three is slightly more than \$1,600.

"They can get help with food stamps, but food stamps don't pay the rent," Zehnder-Merrell said.

Meanwhile, a report last week from Michigan's Children showed that welfare caseloads have been increasing since 2001, from 69,548 to a projected 79,000 in 2007. But monthly grant levels to families have not changed since 1993, causing families' purchasing power to decline by one-third.

Funding for programs promoting family stability and preventing child abuse and neglect dropped from \$78 million to \$67.1 million in 2007. An executive order eliminated state funding for nine child advocacy centers that investigate child abuse claims.

"There's just a lot of pressure on families and a tremendous erosion of support for families," Zehnder-Merrell said.

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### Kids Count

Kids Count in Michigan, the annual report that measures the well being of the state's children, found challenges and progress in 2005.

#### Challenges

- More children are living in low income families.
- More children are victims of abuse and neglect.
- No improvement in maternal low birth weights and infant mortality rates.

#### Progress

- Teen birth and death rates declined.
- Lower child death rates.
- Fewer children going into out of home care for delinquency.

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Published December 12, 2006

## More students getting food stamps

Free, reduced-price lunches also on rise, annual report finds

Associated Press

More children are receiving food stamps and discounted school lunches as Michigan's economy continues to falter, according to an analysis of state and federal statistics released Tuesday.

The annual Kids Count report also shows a higher percentage of children covered by Medicaid.

The increased reliance on taxpayer-funded programs is at least partly due to Michigan's economy, said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, senior research associate with the Michigan League for Human Services. The state's unemployment rate has been among the nation's highest for the past few years, and the 6.9 percent rate reported for October was the nation's highest.

"We're going through a pretty hard time," Zehnder-Merrell said. "The important thing is to protect the next generation as much as we can while families try to find their footing in a very different economic place."

The Kids Count report is put together by groups including the Michigan League for Human Services and Michigan's Children, using state and federal statistics. The report was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Skillman Foundation, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation and local United Ways.

In late fall or early winter, a Kids Count report shows a county-by-county breakdown of the latest available child well-being statistics. In the summer, a Kids Count report compares Michigan with the rest of the nation.

The latest report says 19 percent of Michigan children received food stamps in 2005, up from about 10 percent in 2000. Children in families with incomes below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for food stamps.

The percentage of children receiving food stamps in 2005 was 25 percent or greater in Arenac, Clare, Genesee, Iosco, Lake, Muskegon, Oceana, Ogemaw, Roscommon, Saginaw and Wayne counties.

Zehnder-Merrell said one problem is food stamps are designed to cover two-thirds of food costs, so families struggle to come up with the remaining third.

### On the Web

- Kids Count: [www.aecf.org/kidscount](http://www.aecf.org/kidscount)
- Michigan League for Human Services: [www.milhs.org](http://www.milhs.org)
- Michigan's Children: [www.michiganschildren.org](http://www.michiganschildren.org)

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The percentage of Michigan students receiving free or reduced-price school lunches was 37.1 percent in the 2005-06 academic year, compared with 31.6 percent in 1997-98.

The percentage of Michigan children classified as living in poverty declined from 18 percent in 1997 to 15 percent in 2003.

Updated poverty statistics for 2005 cover only 28 Michigan counties with populations of more than 65,000 people. Those statistics show the child poverty rate in Michigan was 18.5 percent, ranging from a low of 6.3 percent in Livingston County to a high of 30.6 percent in Berrien County.

More than 32 percent of Michigan children relied on Medicaid for health care coverage in 2005, up from 20 percent in 2000.

### Key findings in '06 Kids Count data book

The Kids Count in Michigan Data Book 2006 was released today, providing key statistics on children's health throughout Michigan. Here's how mid-Michigan stacked up against the state in several categories:

MI Ingham Eaton Clinton

Children in poverty 15% 15.9% 10.3% 7.4%

Victims of abuse/neglect (per 1,000) 11.1 12.8 11.5 11.5

Students in special education 14.9% 15.1% 15.4% 14.8%

Children insured by Medicaid 32.1% 32.5% 24.5% 18.1%

Teen deaths (per 100,000) 60.5 31.9 66.7 77.4

Source: Kids Count Data Book 2006

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## Economy blamed as more kids rely on food stamps

Tuesday, December 12, 2006

By Sharon Emery and Barton Deiters

The Grand Rapids Press

With the economy in poor shape, the news only gets worse when the impact on local children is studied.

A report released today shows the percentage of children in Kent County receiving food stamps has more than doubled since 2000. In Ottawa County, that percentage has nearly quadrupled.

"It doesn't surprise me," said Joan Krause, chairwoman for the Kent County Department of Human Services Board, which oversees the food stamp program. "The economy is in terrible shape, and even food banks are struggling."

In Kent County, 17.7 percent of children -- about 164,680 -- were fed last year with the help of the federal Food Assistance Program, also known as food stamps, according to Kids Count in Michigan. In 2000, the number of children receiving food stamps stood at 7.7 percent.

This comes on top of a sharp increase in poverty in Grand Rapids, where recent census estimates show a rise from 15.7 percent in 1999 to 20.8 percent in 2005.

The annual assessment of child well-being is part of a national effort supported here by the Michigan League for Human Services and Michigan's Children advocacy groups.

In Ottawa County, the number is lower, with 68,449 kids receiving food stamps -- 8.5 percent of the population. But in 2000, only 2.2 percent of kids were in the program.

"The higher-paying jobs just aren't there," said Loren Snippe, director of the Ottawa County Department of Human Services in Holland. "Are we subsidizing the folks in these lower-paying jobs? Probably."

What's happening locally is mirrored statewide. In Michigan, 19 percent of children -- more than 513,000 -- were using the program, nearly double the 10 percent who were served in 2000.

"A lack of vital nutrients during the growing-up years can have a lifelong impact on individual potential," said Michele Corey, of Michigan's Children.

Children under age 5 were most likely to receive government-provided food, with one of every four participating, according to the study, funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Detroit-based Skillman Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation and local United Way organizations.

While federal food stamp eligibility has been expanded over the years, advocates said the steady increase in participation since 2000 indicates the economy has played the most significant role.

"Even if parents are working, they're just not making enough to make ends meet," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, a Michigan League for Human Services researcher.

Families become eligible for food stamps when their income falls below 130 percent of the federal poverty rate, or about \$20,500 for a mother with two children. Children received an average of \$90 per month as part of their families' food stamp allotment.

About one-third of Michigan's children, some 893,000, depended upon the government for their health care

last year, the report found. Children qualify for Medicaid when the family income falls below 150 percent of poverty, or about \$24,135 for a family of three.

"As wages erode and costs for housing, health and transportation soar, families struggle to make ends meet," Zehnder-Merrell said. "These programs play a vital role in helping families meet basic needs."

Statistics show low-income families and children account for nearly all the explosive growth in Medicaid since 2000. More than 1.6 million residents are served by the health insurance program.

In addition, more than 155,000 children, about 6 percent, received Family Independence Program cash assistance, the report said. The maximum monthly welfare grant is \$489, given to about 80,000 families in which adults are working, in training programs or unable to work due to disability.

Increasing that grant "would allow more stability in housing and basic care of children," the report found, noting the maximum grant for families isn't enough to cover rent for a two-bedroom residence in any Michigan county.

Republican lawmakers are moving this week to limit welfare benefits to 48 weeks and sanction recipients who do not comply with work requirements. The Granholm administration has vetoed similar legislation.

Stressed families also mean 40 percent more children were confirmed victims of abuse or neglect in 2005 than in 1997, according to the report. Some 28,000 children were confirmed victims last year, most suffering from neglect, which often results from poverty.

"The erosion in state revenue has resulted in the sharp curtailment of many programs and services to prevent child abuse and neglect," Zehnder-Merrell said.

A review this spring by the Press Lansing Bureau found state spending on abuse prevention declined \$15 million between 2000 and 2006.

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## KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### Kids Count charts rising poverty

Tuesday, December 12, 2006

By Linda S. Mah

[lmah@kalamazoogazette.com](mailto:lmah@kalamazoogazette.com) 388-8546

The percentage of children in Kalamazoo County who are on free or reduced-price lunch, eligible for Medicaid and receiving food stamps has grown in recent years.

Some 16.7 percent of the approximately 58,000 children living in the county were living in poverty in 2005, according to Kids Count in Michigan, a report on the well-being of children in the state that was released on Monday. That compares to 12.3 percent in 1999, according to the U.S. Census.

"The rate of children in poverty is much higher than adults," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, senior research associate for the Lansing-based Michigan League for Human Services, which helped assemble the data.

"Economic security is the bedrock of childhood well-being. It affects all other domains."

According to the Kids Count report, about 36.8 percent of children in Kalamazoo County were receiving free or reduced-price school lunches last school year, up 5.6 percentage points since 1997-98. About 30 percent of children were insured by Medicaid last year -- compared to about 20 percent in 1999 -- meaning their families have incomes below 150 percent of the federal poverty level. And almost 20 percent of children received food stamps last year -- compared to about 10 percent in 2000 -- meaning their families have incomes below 130 percent of the poverty level.

The federal poverty level is an income of \$20,000 for a family of four.

Across the state, more children are depending on the government for basic necessities such as food and health care. Nineteen percent of Michigan's children -- more than 513,000 -- last year were fed in part through the federal Food Assistance Program, also known as food stamps, nearly double the 10 percent who were served in 2000.

"I always say there is nothing wrong with our children's brains, but the social issues from which they come are like a great big barrier for them," Janice Brown, superintendent of Kalamazoo Public Schools, said during a press conference Monday at the Kalamazoo Regional Chamber of Commerce Building.

Children under age 5 were most likely to receive government-provided food, with one of every four participating, according to the Kids Count study.

The report listed child poverty rates for Berrien County at 30.6 percent and Van Buren County at 25 percent, but the report urged caution when looking at those numbers because of the high statistical margin of error. Calhoun County was listed as having a rate of 20.6 percent, while Allegan had a rate of 9.6 percent.

Sherry Cloud Thomas, executive director of the Kalamazoo County Department of Human Services, said poverty could even be tied to some of the report's more disturbing data about child safety.

The report indicated an increase in abuse and neglect cases in Kalamazoo County.

Some of the increase reflects more diligent investigation of abuse and neglect claims, but it also reflects the "research showing there is a correlation between economic stress and the numbers of children who are abused and neglected," Thomas said.

Those numbers also represent parents who cannot afford adequate child care and thus leave themselves open to charges of neglect, Zehnder-Merrell said.

On a positive note, the study reported a decrease in teen birth rates, to 29.5 percent of live births in 2002-04 from 39.6 percent in 1995-97.

For the first year, the report did not include data on dropout rates, because of concerns about the unreliability of that data. But the report does cover immunization data for toddlers.

"I think the moral of this story -- and that is the word, 'moral' -- is that we have to do the right thing," Brown said. "This truly is about how we can as a community do a better job of rounding up and exploring resources on behalf of very, very young children."

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## THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

### More children needing food aid

Federal assistance doubles since 2000

Tuesday, December 12, 2006

**BY SHARON EMERY**

Ann Arbor News Bureau

LANSING - With their parents struggling and often stumbling in Michigan's economic downturn, more children depend on the government for basic necessities such as food and health care, a report released today found.

Nineteen percent of Michigan's children - more than 513,000 - last year were fed in part through the federal Food Assistance Program, also known as food stamps, nearly double the 10 percent who were served in 2000, according to Kids Count in Michigan. The annual assessment of child well-being is part of a national effort supported here by the Michigan League for Human Services and Michigan's Children advocacy groups.

Washtenaw County and Livingston County both showed a rise in children receiving assistance and other indicators of economic stress, although their numbers were considerably better across the board than the state averages.

For instance, just 4.7 percent of children in Livingston County received food stamps. In Washtenaw County that figure was 10.5 percent.

"A lack of vital nutrients during the growing-up years can have a lifelong impact on individual potential," ultimately affecting children's ability to succeed, said Michele Corey, of Michigan's Children.

Children under age 5 were most likely to receive government-provided food, with one of every four participating, according to the study, funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Detroit-based Skillman Foundation, the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation and local United Ways.

While federal food stamp eligibility rules have been expanded over the years, advocates said the steady increase in participation since 2000 indicates the economy played the overriding role.

"Even if parents are working, they're just not making enough to make ends meet," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, a Michigan League for Human Services researcher.

Families become eligible for food stamps when their income falls below 130 percent of the federal poverty rate, or about \$20,500 for a mom with two children. Children received an average of about \$90 per month as part of their families' Food Stamp allotment.

About one-third of Michigan's children, some 893,000, depended upon the government for their health care last year, the report found. Children qualify for Medicaid when family income falls below 150 percent of poverty, or about \$24,135 for a family of three.

In Washtenaw County, about 18 percent of children 18 or

under were insured by

Medicaid, compared to about 12 percent in Livingston County last year.

"As wages erode and costs for housing, health and transportation soar, families struggle to make ends meet," Zehnder-Merrell said. "These programs play a vital role in helping families meet basic needs."

Statistics show that low-income families and children account for nearly all the explosive growth in Medicaid since 2000. More than 1.6 million residents are served by the health insurance program.

In addition, more than 155,000 children, about 6 percent, received Family Independence Program cash assistance, the report said. The maximum monthly welfare grant is \$489, given to about 80,000 families in which adults are working, in training programs or deferred from work due to disability.

About 3 percent of children in Washtenaw County received such assistance. The 223 children in Livingston County amounted to half a percentage point of the county's children.

Republican lawmakers are moving this week to limit welfare benefits to 48 weeks and sanction recipients who aren't complying with work requirements. The Granholm administration has vetoed similar legislation.

Stressed families also mean 40 percent more children were confirmed victims of abuse or neglect in 2005 than in 1997, according to the report. Some 28,000 children were confirmed victims last year, most suffering from neglect, which often results from poverty.

The latest rankings showed Livingston with 201 such victims, the second lowest rank in the state. Washtenaw had 426 victims, sixth lowest out of the state's 82 counties.

News Staff Reporter Geoff Larcom contributed to this story.

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# THE BAY CITY TIMES

## Report: Poor economy erodes conditions for Michigan's children

Tuesday, December 12, 2006

By **CRYSTAL HARMON**

**TIMES WRITER**

The news is mixed for area children as reflected in the annual Kids Count in Michigan data book outlining trends in child-welfare statistics county by county.

Bay County logged a dramatic increase in the number of children in families being investigated for abuse or neglect; that number rose from 958 in 1997 to 1,587 last year. Confirmed cases of abuse and neglect are likewise up, from 140 to 239 over those same years, an increase of 71 percent.

Bay County Probate Court Administrator Marge Marchlewicz said that the glut of cases last year was noticeable.

"We were just in awe of the numbers coming in," she said. "This year, it's calmed down a little bit."

Only the most severe cases of neglect and abuse reach Probate Court; in 2005 in Bay County, 122 children were placed in out-of-home care for abuse or neglect, up from 103 in 1997.

"I suspect that the economy is playing a role," Marchlewicz said. "Whenever finances get tight in any family, tension increases and all kinds of thing can happen."

In at least 50 percent of abuse/neglect cases, substance abuse plays a role, and Bay County is working to initiate a drug court that focuses on family issues, she said.

Statewide, 40 percent more children were confirmed victims of abuse or neglect in 2005 than in 1997, according to the report. Some 28,000 children were confirmed victims last year, most suffering from neglect, which often results from poverty.

"The erosion in state revenue has resulted in the sharp curtailment of many programs and services to prevent child abuse and neglect," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, a researcher for the Michigan League for Human Services.

### Feeding the poor

Another indicator of a worsening picture for Bay County children is the number of babies born to moms who received inadequate care; that number jumped from 173 babies, of 12.9 percent in 1995-97, to 264 babies, or 21 percent, in 2002-04.

The good news for Bay County children, though, is that fewer are living in poverty; in 2003, that number was 3,605 children compared to 1997, when 5,693 of the county's children lived in poverty.

At the same time, though, the percentage of school-aged children receiving free or reduced-price lunch grew from 30.2 percent in 1998 to 39.1 last year. More than a third of Bay County children receive Medicaid, and 7.1 percent have no health insurance.

The state's sour economy has a trickle-down effect, experts say, that leaves kids short of basic necessities.

Nineteen percent of Michigan's children - more than 513,000 - last year were fed in part through the federal Food Assistance Program, also known as food stamps, nearly double the 10 percent who were served in 2000, according to the survey.

"A lack of vital nutrients during the growing-up years can have a lifelong impact on individual potential," ultimately affecting children's ability to succeed, said Michele Corey, of Michigan's Children.

Children under age 5 were most likely to receive government-provided food, with one of every four participating, according to the study, funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Detroit-based Skillman Foundation, the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation and local United Ways.

While federal food stamp eligibility rules have been expanded over the years, advocates said the steady increase in participation since 2000 indicates the economy played an overriding role.

Families become eligible for food stamps when their income falls below 130 percent of the federal poverty rate, or about \$20,500 for a mom with two children. Children received an average of about \$90 per month as part of their families' food stamp allotment.

#### Health-care needs

About one-third of Michigan's children, some 893,000, depended upon the government for their health care last year, the report found. Children qualify for Medicaid when family income falls below 150 percent of poverty, or about \$24,135 for a family of three.

"As wages erode and costs for housing, health and transportation soar, families struggle to make ends meet," Zehnder-Merrell said. "These programs play a vital role in helping families meet basic needs."

Statistics show that low-income families and children account for nearly all the explosive growth in Medicaid since 2000. More than 1.6 million residents are served by the health-insurance program.

In addition, more than 155,000 children, about 6 percent, received Family Independence Program cash assistance, the report said. The maximum monthly welfare grant is \$489, given to about 80,000 families in which adults are working, in training programs or deferred from work due to disability.

Some statistics of note for Northeast Michigan counties:

- In Crawford County last year, 84 of 3,146 child residents were confirmed victims of child abuse, giving the county a rate of 26.3 per thousand - the highest in the state.

n In Arenac County last year, 385 of the county's 17,154 children were in families being investigated for child abuse or neglect; 58 of those cases were confirmed.

- Gladwin County likewise saw an increase in the number of confirmed victims of child abuse from 1997 to 2005, when the number more than doubled, rising from 35 to 72.

n In Clare County, 23 percent of children live in poverty, 54 percent get reduced school meals and 47 percent are on Medicaid.

Statewide, the grimmest numbers in many categories were posted in Lake County, which has the highest rate of child poverty, reduced lunch recipients, teen pregnancies and the largest percentage of children in families investigated for neglect.

View the full report at [www.milhs.org/information/default.asp?NavPageID=50097](http://www.milhs.org/information/default.asp?NavPageID=50097)

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## Report: Lots of kids in poverty Reliance on food aid, Medicaid on the rise

Tuesday, December 12, 2006

By Tarryl Jackson

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Killed by his mother after years of abuse, Ricky Holland's short life was undeniably tragic.

But though extreme cases like his draw intense scrutiny, child advocates say it's important not to forget the thousands of other children neglected or not given proper care.

"You don't get another chance with children," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, senior research associate of the Michigan League for Human Services.

More children in Jackson County, which has been hit with plant closings and layoffs in recent years, are living in poverty, and relying on food stamps and Medicaid, according to a report by Kids Count in Michigan released Monday. The statewide report compares participation in public-assistance programs from 2000 to 2005.

The percentage of children in the county who participated in the Food Assistance Program jumped from 9 percent in 2000 to 20 percent in 2005. The percentage of county children insured by Medicaid went from 20 percent in 2000 to 35 percent in 2005.

"People need to be really aware of the big picture," said Ken Toll, executive director of United Way of Jackson County. "We need to take a look at where our resources are going."

Zehnder-Merrell said Jackson County's teen birth rate was alarming at 51 births per 1,000 teens in 2005. The state average is 34 births per 1,000 teens.

Judy Jove, executive director of Family Service and Children's Aid of Jackson County, said the Jackson area has struggled with teen pregnancy but is working to change that.

"We have some great programs and some really dedicated people that work with that population," she said.

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# Report: 40% of children in Michigan live in poverty

Val Lego

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Michigan's poor economy is being blamed for a rise child safety issues including healthcare and child abuse. The findings are from the most recent Kids Count in Michigan report which states among other issues, that two of every five children in Michigan live in poverty.

In the city of Grand Rapids, there are 45,000 kids under the age of five; nearly 13% of them are living in families with a federal poverty income of just over \$20,000 a year. Despite that fact, Candace Crowling with Kent County's Child and Family Resource Council says there are some positive statistics coming out of this latest statewide report, "I would be happy if any time we took action we asked ourselves is this good for children? And I think kids count gives us an opportunity to take that pause and do that."

The number of children who have health insurance has improved, more children are being tested for lead poisoning and fewer teenagers are having babies. That's the good news. The bad news surrounds a statewide increase in child abuse and neglect cases that Crowling says includes Kent County, "We're not sure whether that is attributed to better reporting or we're seeing an increase. In either case it's any child that is getting abused or neglect is too many."

In 1998 Kent County reported 852 cases that number has continued to climb to 1,970 reported cases in 2005. That's an increase of nearly 114%. What's even more troubling is that it's predicted only 10% of all abuse and neglect are reported, which Crowling says means there could be even more cases, "There are children in this community who are in harms way and to me it's a call to action to say what can we do as a community to help these children be safe and they parents succeed in good parenting."

Healthy Start is one program already in place. It's designed to help first time parents build a foundation for parenthood as seen in this video provided to us by the Child and Family Resource Council. The hope is programs like this will help prevent cases of abuse. "We're encouraged by the efforts that are going down especially in the early childhood and we think over time these numbers that we see increasing can go down." says Crowling.

Here re the poverty and abuse numbers in Ottawa and Muskegon counties.

Muskegon County lived at the federal poverty level compared to only 6% in Ottawa County. In 2004 those numbers stayed about the about the same in Ottawa but went down in Muskegon to 17.5%.

And when it comes to child abuse and neglect, in 1997 Ottawa County reported 249 cases and Muskegon County reported 328. In 2005 the numbers followed the statewide trend and increased. Ottawa County reported 342 case and Muskegon reported 668.

To view more statistics for west Michigan and the entire state just go to the news links section of our website.



Web Editor: [Chris Zoladz](#), Associate Producer

Web Editor: [Valerie Lego](#), Weekend Anchor / Health Reporting



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December 11, 2006

## **REPORT FINDS MORE CHILDREN DEPEND ON ASSISTANCE**

A growing population of the state's children depend in some way on public assistance, according to the latest Kids Count in Michigan report to be released Tuesday.

Statewide, 15 percent of children lived at or below the federal poverty line in 2003, the most recent year for which there is data. That is down from 18 percent in 1997.

But the percentage of children whose families are eligible for Food Assistance Program benefits, at or below 130 percent of poverty, rose to nearly 20 percent in 2005 from just above 10 percent in 2000.

The percentage of children eligible for Medicaid has grown to 32.1 percent in 2005 from just over 20 percent in 1999.

And health statistics for children are a mixed bag. More children have adequate prenatal care, 78.2 percent in 2002-04 from 76 percent in 1995-97. And the number of births to teen mothers dropped over that period to 34.4 per 1,000 births from 47.7 per 1,000 births. But the percentage of low-birth weight babies increase to 8.2 percent from 7.7 percent. And the infant mortality rate held steady at 8.1 deaths per thousand live births.

More children are also being confirmed victims of abuse or neglect, 11.1 children per 1,000 in fiscal year 2004-05 from 7.9 per 1,000 in FY 1996-97. Abuse and neglect are also an increasing reason for out-of-home placements, with 6.7 such placements per thousand in FY 2004-05 and 5.8 in FY 1996-97, compared to .9 placements for delinquency per thousand children in FY 2004-05 from 1.6 in FY 1996-97.

The Michigan League for Human Services, which compiles the annual report, said much of the environment for children can be blamed on the economy. "As wages erode and costs for housing, health and transportation soar, families struggle to make ends meet," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, project director. "Unfortunately families become ineligible (for assistance programs) at income levels that are not adequate to meet basic needs."

Among the state's 28 largest counties, those with more than 65,000 people, poverty for children ranged from about 6 percent in Clinton, Livingston and Ottawa counties to about 31 percent in Berrien County, according to information provided to Kids Count by the American Community Survey. Wayne County had about 29 percent of children living in poverty.

Among other highlights, death rates for both children and teens are dropping, with 21 deaths per 100,000 children ages 1-14 in 2004 from 25 per 100,000 in 1997. The teen death rate was 61 per 100,000 in 2004 compared to 80 in 1997.

The report also found continuing racial disparities in the state, with higher levels of poverty and low birth weights among black children than among whites.

## Foster mom to stand trial

### Murder and child abuse charged in 2-year-old's death

**BY JACK KRESNAK**  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

*December 12, 2006*

Despite an autopsy that could not determine whether 2-year-old Allison Newman died of an accident or someone's intentional act, the girl's foster mother, Carol Ann Poole, was ordered Monday to stand trial on homicide and child-abuse charges.

After hearing testimony from two doctors, another foster mother, three police officers and a Canton Public Safety dispatcher, 35th District Judge John E. MacDonald in Plymouth ruled that the 40-year-old Poole should stand trial in Wayne County Circuit Court on charges of first-degree felony murder, first-degree child abuse and involuntary manslaughter in Allison's death.

Poole's stories about what happened to Allison on Sept. 20-22 varied significantly, police said.

The child was flown by helicopter to Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor, where she was declared brain dead Sept. 22. Canton police detectives Mike Wells and Jeff Pomorski questioned Poole there and heard four stories, beginning with the girl banging her head on her bed Sept. 20. Wells testified Monday that Poole told the detectives Allison had bruises and a bad headache the next day so she kept her home from day care.



Wells said that when detectives said they doubted her story, Poole then said Allison had fallen hard in the bathtub and later that Allison fell off the bathroom sink counter.

Wells said he still didn't believe that story. That is when Poole told him about playing whirly bird with Allison on the second-floor balcony. Poole said she became dizzy and her grasp of the child slipped, sending her over the railing to a 12-foot drop on her head.

Poole is being held without bond in the Wayne County Jail.

Mark Satawa, Poole's attorney, said there was no evidence of felony murder and nothing to show that Poole intended to hurt the child.

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December 12, 2006

## Foster mom's tales shift

Canton Twp. woman heads to trial in death of 2-year-old girl

Iveory Perkins / The Detroit News

**PLYMOUTH** -- When police asked how 2-year-old Allison Newman could have suffered a crushing blow to the head that ultimately led to her death, Carol Poole had at least four explanations for what happened to the foster child in her care.

Allison frequently banged her head on her toddler bed, Poole said.

Later, she told police Allison was dizzy after a game of "whirlybird" and must have slipped off a second-floor balcony in a 12-foot fall.

By another of Poole's accounts, Allison slipped in the shower. Or, Poole said, she fell off the bathroom counter.

It was Poole's last account that sounded "true," Canton Detective Michael Wells said Monday at Poole's preliminary examination in 35th District Court in Plymouth.

"Each one was a separate individual story that she would start to tell and then stop," Wells said. "But after that story, it didn't change."

On Monday, 35th District Judge John MacDonald bound Poole, 40, over for trial on charges of felony murder, first-degree child abuse and involuntary manslaughter in the Sept. 22 death of Allison at her Canton Township home. If convicted, Poole faces life in prison.

The packed courtroom was full of emotion, and several people shed tears while listening to a taped 911 call describing the lifeless toddler.

Poole's voice could be heard asking for help and uttering: "She is not breathing."

A police dispatcher asked Poole if Allison was moving and she replied, "no," before repeatedly yelling, "Oh my God."

"We are very disappointed at the outcome," said Alan Poole, Carol's husband. "Carol is a good person, and she wouldn't do this."

Carol Poole, wearing a green prisoner's jumpsuit, cried briefly at times during the four hours of testimony given by seven witnesses called by the prosecution.

Allison had been in the care of the Pooles for about eight months before dying of severe head trauma at Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor.

Hugh Garton, a pediatric neurosurgeon at the University of Michigan, testified that Allison's death was caused by the loss of oxygen to her brain.

Defense attorney Mark Satawa argued that the child's death was a tragic accident and nothing more.

"There is no evidence of intent," Satawa said outside the courtroom Monday. "There never was and never will be. This was not a homicide."

Allison was the third high-profile case of a Michigan child dying in foster care this year, prompting calls for reform.

Last month, Tim and Lisa Holland of Williamston were sentenced to lengthy prison terms in November for killing their adopted son, Ricky, who was once their foster child.

And Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy's office continues to investigate the Aug. 16 death of 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge, who was beaten to death in his Detroit foster home. No charges have been brought in that case.

Alan Poole said his wife is "being made an example out of," because of the recent controversy surrounding foster parents.

However, Craig Hirsch, the biological, maternal grandfather of Allison, disagrees.

"I feel like there is some sort of justice being done," Hirsch said. "I am happy with the outcome today."

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## Foster mother to stand trial in 2-year-old's death

PLYMOUTH, Mich. -- The foster mother of a 2-year-old girl who died of head injuries was ordered to stand trial on charges of first-degree murder, first-degree child abuse and involuntary manslaughter.

District Judge John E. MacDonald on Monday ordered Carol Ann Poole, 40, of Wayne County's Canton Township, tried in the death of Allison Newman in her home.

Prosecutors said Poole called 911 for help on Sept. 20 when the girl was unresponsive. Allison was pronounced brain dead two days later at Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor, where Poole gave detectives four different accounts of what had happened.

Hugh Garton, a pediatric neurosurgeon at the University of Michigan, testified during Poole's preliminary hearing that Allison's death was caused by the loss of oxygen to her brain. MacDonald ordered Poole tried on homicide charges even though the autopsy could not determine whether the toddler died accidentally or by someone's intentional act.

Defense attorney Mark Satawa said there was no evidence of felony murder and nothing to show that Poole meant to hurt the child.

Poole is being held without bond in the Wayne County Jail. If convicted of first-degree murder, she faces mandatory life in prison without parole.

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Article published Dec 11, 2006

## Father accused of abusing infant son

By Kurt Kuban  
Staff Writer

Canton resident Steven Michael Szyszkowski, 26, was arraigned Saturday on two charges of first degree child abuse, each charge punishable by up to 15 years in prison. Canton police say he seriously injured his five-week-old son, who doctors determined had nine broken bones.

Szyszkowski pleaded not guilty, and he was given a \$30,000 cash bond. He is currently being held in Wayne County Jail. His preliminary examination is scheduled for Dec. 22 at 35th District Court in Plymouth.

Canton police officers arrested Szyszkowski, who lives in a mobile home in the 51000 block of Mott Road, last week after receiving a tip from an anonymous female caller, who told police she had heard a rumor that he was abusing his son.

"She heard from a friend that this guy might be abusing the baby," said Canton Detective Sgt. Rick Pomorski.

After receiving the call, two Canton officers were dispatched to the home. Pomorski said the officers arrested him on some minor outstanding warrants. When they checked the baby, they noticed minor injuries, according to Pomorski. As a matter of procedure, they called for a rescue unit to transport the newborn to the University of Michigan's Mott Children's Hospital, where he was examined by doctors.

Doctors determined he had nine broken bones, including a tibia, fibula and some toes. The newborn remains in stable condition at Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor.

Police investigators believe Szyszkowski, who is unemployed, was home alone with the child when the injuries occurred. The baby's mother also lives in the home, but police don't believe she was involved in the injuries. However, Pomorski said he is unsure whether Child Protective Services will allow the woman to take the baby home after he is released from the hospital.

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# ClickOnDetroit.com

## Father Charged With Abusing 5-Week-Old Boy

POSTED: 5:38 pm EST December 11, 2006

UPDATED: 8:35 am EST December 12, 2006

A father has been arraigned for abusing his 5-week-old baby.

Steven Michael Szyszkowski, 26, of Canton, was arraigned on Dec. 9 on two charges of first-degree child abuse.

On Dec. 7, Canton police responded to Szyszkowski's home after a concerned resident called and requested they check on the infant inside the home.

When officers arrived at the home they immediately called rescue units to take the infant.

Doctors from the Child Protection Team at Mott's Children's Hospital said the infant boy suffered from a total of nine broken bones.

Officers said they suspected foul play by Szyszkowski from the initial response to the home and he was taken into custody pending an investigation.

On Dec. 9 Szyszkowski entered a not guilty plea.

Szyszkowski is being held on a \$30,000 cash bond.

A preliminary exam is scheduled for Dec. 22 at the 35th District Court in Plymouth.

The infant remains in stable condition at Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor.

### Previous Stories:

- December 8, 2006: [Father Suspected Of Abusing Infant](#)

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Published December 12, 2006

## **Melot: Parent trap snares Mich. - Ricky's case shows how much society wants to turn away**

Derek Melot  
dmelot@lsj.com  
377-1256

Mid-Michigan doesn't need a big report from the Department of Human Services on what went wrong with protecting Ricky Holland.

Nor is a separate report from the Ingham County Prosecutor's Office a necessity.

In our hearts, all of us know the answer to 7-year-old Ricky's death:

Some people have no business being parents.

Understand, the just-released DHS report on how the state handled Ricky isn't valueless. It's an excellent start of a conversation on how society should value and protect its children.

The broad stroke is DHS workers didn't follow their own procedures in some cases with Ricky, who was killed by Lisa Holland, in concert with Tim Holland. A disturbing 10 of the 23 employees involved in the case are under investigation, according to the DHS.

The politicians are promising more oversight, more reform, more protection. In their hearts, they probably mean it.

But out in the real world, these good desires won't translate into much.

We'll hire more protective workers. Folks accused of abuse in the near future are going to face merciless prosecution. We'll tweak our procedures and look to efficiencies.

And we'll hope the problem goes away, even when, in our hearts, we know it won't.

Unlike cutting someone's hair or driving a limo, parenting requires no special training or demonstration of aptitude. If you've got the biology covered, you can have a kid. Anyone - most able, a few horrendously not - can do it.

Society will offer encouraging words and ideas, but generally wants to stay out of parenting issues.

There's reason for this hands-off approach. The right to procreate is basic. The traditional cultural attitude is, "No one's going to tell me what to do with my kids!"

And do we really want government in the business of choosing parents and non- parents?

Yet, that's the fact the Ricky case highlights: The state already is deeply involved in deciding who parents and who doesn't.

The state was compelled to terminate the rights of Ricky's biological mother. The state then assigned Ricky, as a foster child, to Lisa and Tim Holland. The state was OK with the Hollands eventually adopting Ricky.

During all that, the state was checking on Ricky's well-being. Still, he ended up abused and dead.

Ricky was getting plenty of the state's limited attention - and we see the result.

Child abuse isn't a modern scourge. We see more of it due to better reporting and a changing social attitude about whether a man or woman can do anything he or she pleases to a child.

But even with these changes, deep down we still think it's not our business, we still feel that an act of biology can trump common sense.

And, no, there are no easy answers here.

Paying people to delay child-rearing is the best (and admittedly still feeble) preventative I've come up with to navigate between the chilling prospect of government-sanctioned pregnancies and the horror of leaving some children to the tender mercy of sociopaths.

We can say "never again" to each other and our leaders. But, in our hearts, we really don't mean it, do we?

What do you think? Write Derek Melot, Lansing State Journal, 120 E. Lenawee St., Lansing, MI 48919. For past columns, visit [www.lsj.com/columnists](http://www.lsj.com/columnists).

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## Puppy gnaws off baby's toes

note contents

BOSSIER CITY, La. (AP) \_ A Louisiana couple is facing negligence charges after a puppy chewed off four of a baby girl's toes.

They told police they were awakened by their month-old baby's cries on Sunday morning, saw her mangled foot and rushed her to the hospital. But doctors couldn't reattach the toes.

A veterinarian speculates the six-week-old pit bull puppy might have been trying to nurse.

The animal will be quarantined for ten days and checked for rabies. It's unclear what will happen to it after that.

The baby is now in foster care. Her parents have been booked for investigation of child desertion and criminal negligence.

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## 1970S OAKLAND COUNTY CASE: New lead in child deaths

### Suspect allegedly involved in sex ring

**BY MARISOL BELLO, BEN SCHMITT and KORIE WILKINS**

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

December 12, 2006

A convicted killer involved in an alleged child sex ring in Detroit in the 1970s led investigators to another member of the alleged ring, who prosecutors now say is a suspect in the three decades-old Oakland County child killer case.

On Monday, Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy and police investigating the murders of four Oakland County children during the 1970s called 65-year-old Theodore Lamborgine the "most promising suspect at this particular time."

While investigators would not publicly say what specifically may tie the retired Ford auto worker from Parma Heights, Ohio, to the infamous whodunit, sources with knowledge of the investigation, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the case is ongoing, said authorities have long theorized that the four children were killed as part of a brazen pedophilia ring that operated out of Detroit's Cass Corridor during the 1970s.

But the link doesn't make sense to Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca, who said Worthy's assertion that Lamborgine is the strongest lead in some time may be exaggerated.

"I just don't think this suspect matches the profile of the Oakland County child killer," Gorcyca said in a live interview Monday with Free Press reporting partner WDIV-TV Local 4.

Lamborgine and Richard Lawson, convicted last year in a 1989 Livonia murder, were charged last week with running a sex ring in the Cass Corridor during the 1970s and 1980s.

Members of the ring lured their young victims to motels and homes with promises of money, marijuana, food and soda, then sexually assaulted them, officials said. Lamborgine was arraigned Monday on 17 counts of criminal sexual conduct and pleaded not guilty. Lawson is to be arraigned this week.

Investigators said Monday that jailhouse interviews with Lawson led police to look into Lamborgine for the Oakland County killings.

Parma Heights Police Detective Steve Scharschmidt said Lawson said he felt Lamborgine "could be involved."

Sources said Lamborgine has since failed a polygraph test and DNA results are pending.

In the Oakland County child killer case, investigators have a piece of evidence -- a single hair taken from one of the victims -- that they believe belongs to the killer. Over the years, authorities have tested the hair sample against the DNA of several suspects but to no avail.

Three other suspects in the child sex ring, who were not fully named in the court records, are dead.

The men all ran together during the 1970s when Lawson lived in the Cass Corridor, according to court documents.

The court records say that during an interview with Parma Heights police, Lamborgine admitted to sexually abusing eight victims. Lawson is charged with abusing six victims. Both men are charged with abusing some of the same boys, though not at the same time.

Law enforcement sources said the men in the ring lured the victims to the basement of a bicycle shop owned by Bobby Moore, who is now deceased. Court records point to a man named Moore as a deceased suspect in the



Theodore Lamborgine, 65, is led into a 36th District courtroom Monday in Detroit. Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy and those investigating the killings of four Oakland County children during the 1970s said Lamborgine is the "most promising suspect at this particular time." (MARY SCHROEDER/Detroit Free Press)

### The Oakland County Child Killer's victims

The victims -- two girls and two boys -- were abducted and held for days before their bodies were found, dressed in their own clothes. Their bodies were clean, including their fingernails.

- Timothy King, 11, of Birmingham was last seen March 16, 1977, in his hometown. He was found March 22, 1977, in a ditch off Gill Road near 8 Mile in Livonia. He had been sexually assaulted and suffocated.

- Kristine Mihelich, 10, of Berkley was last seen Jan. 2, 1977, near her home. She was found Jan. 21, 1977, on a rural road near Telegraph and 12 Mile in Franklin Village. She had been suffocated.

sex ring.

Investigators say those in the ring made pedophilia movies with the children in Moore's basement, and then sold the films in the United States and Europe.

Sources said investigators theorize that as Detroit police cracked down on the sex trade in the Cass Corridor, the ring members got more brazen and started driving out to the suburbs to kidnap children.

Michigan State Police Detective Sgt. Garry Gray said the original task force investigating the killings listed Lamborgine, Lawson and Bobby Moore in its tip files. The task force interviewed thousands of people in the investigation.

"They just weren't put together at the time," Gray said. "But now, it's come full circle."

Still, there are skeptics.

Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, who was the county prosecutor at the time, said he does not remember Lamborgine's name surfacing when he was actively investigating the case.

"I have to be a Doubting Thomas here," Patterson said. "I've been down this road dozens of times. I'm cautioning the public not to get their hopes up."

Contact **MARISOL BELLO** at 313-222-6678 or [bello@freepress.com](mailto:bello@freepress.com). Contact Ben Schmitt at 313-223-4296 or [bschmitt@freepress.com](mailto:bschmitt@freepress.com).

- Jill Robinson, 12, of Royal Oak was last seen Dec. 22, 1976, in her hometown. She was found Dec. 26, 1976, near I-75 north of Big Beaver in Troy. She had been shot in the head.

- Mark Stebbins, 12, of Ferndale was last seen Feb. 15, 1976, in his hometown. He was found Feb. 19, 1976, near a parking lot at the Fairfax Plaza Building, at 10 Mile and Greenfield, in Southfield. He had been sexually assaulted and strangled.

Prosecutors are asking anyone who may have been victimized by suspects in the Cass Corridor sex ring to call 248-584-5740.

Korie Wilkins

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## Ex-aide to Walberg sentenced, fined

Tuesday, December 12, 2006

Daniel A. Coons, 30, of Eaton Rapids, was found guilty Friday of domestic violence in Eaton County District Court.

Coons resigned in October from the campaign of U.S. Rep.-elect Tim Walberg, R-Tipton.

The former volunteer coordinator was fined \$1,535 and sentenced to two years probation. Judge Julie H. Reincke ruled the conviction will remain permanently on Coons' record, though she could have allowed it to be expunged after a year.

Under the ruling, Coons is barred from contact with his victim, a 9-year-old male foster child. Coons and his wife, Sarah, are trying to adopt the boy and his 4-year-old sister, who have both been removed from their home. A Probate Court hearing is slated for Jan. 5.

Coons' domestic violence conviction will be taken into account in adoption proceedings, said prosecutor's office spokeswoman Theresa O'Dell.

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12/11/2006

## Foster Parents Needed for Van Buren County Youths

By Paul Garrod

Approximately 17.6 percent of the children housed in 2006 at The Link Crisis Intervention Center in Benton Harbor are from Van Buren County, according to a Crisis Intervention Center official.

Kathy Mammel, who recently moved from Ann Arbor to St. Joseph, where she serves as Homeless Youth Program coordinator for The Link, said the site currently serves as "home" to 14 youths from southwestern Michigan.

The Link is a program of Child & Family Services of Southwestern Michigan, Inc.

A startling fact Mammel reported is that the average age of area homeless youth is nine years, while the national level is age seven.

Mammel said there are a variety of reasons attributing to youth homelessness, from parents offering no support, involvement with drugs, loss of jobs, poverty, illness, or a breakdown of extended family connections.

Mammel herself, has served as a foster parent for 32 years, after initially responding to a foster parent ad in a local paper while living in Ann Arbor.

And after 153 kids who have passed through her doors, she has many pleasant memories mixed in during those three decades, and some that were a challenge to be met.

"I'm Grandma Kathy to some," she said.

However, another foster child rebuffed Mammel one day, saying, "You're not my mother. I will not love you."

Time has a way of healing, said Mammel, and those words changed 20 years later when she received a phone call from the youth, who said, "I never really told you I love you."

Proud accomplishments have come back to Mammel from those youths that resided with her by way of college graduation announcements. Others have furthered their college education to become doctors.

Sadly, she said, "Some, you never hear from."

Mammel said the foster parent program has undergone several changes over the past three decades. She noted foster parents were required to sign papers in the 1970s stating they could not adopt the foster children in their care. It is now common practice, according to Mammel.

Mammel's adopted daughter, now 27, was the fourth foster child adopted in the state under the High Risk Adoption program.

"We all take for granted that we have a heritage. These kids have nothing," said Mammel of the many area youths who await foster parents.

She added, "They're like sponges soaking it up. We all want family and friends. They have nothing."

As Mammel's two biological sons, now 37 and 36, grew up with "extended" brothers and sisters, she said. One son now has an adopted foster child.

When her daughter married, she asked her two "brothers" to walk her down the aisle. (Her father had died when she was a child).

When a foster child leaves her home, Mammel allows the youth to take with them his or her favorite toy.

Mammel recalled a unique request from one 10-year-old boy, whom she thought wanted Legos.

Instead, the boy asked if he could take home table placements, saying he wanted to show his biological family that they could eat together as a family.

"It's all simple little things that we take for granted that they hunger for," said Mammel.

During the past 32 years, Mammel has had one or two children reside with her at a time, but never more than four. Some stayed for the weekend, while others stayed longer periods.

"We hated to break up siblings," she said. "Every case is different."

Mammel said, "Sometimes, it just doesn't work. You can't lose your family identity by taking on a foster child and have your core family fall apart," as was the case with a 12-year-old girl who had fallen into pornography.

"She just wasn't going to change. We had to let her go," said Mammel.

Mammel said many of the foster kids that she has taken in are thankful for a home, a bed to sleep in, three square meals a day, and someone there to listen.

"They enjoyed the small, little things like placemats and reading stories at night," she said.

"There are children in this area that need homes," said Mammel.

The goal of The Link is to recruit and support new foster parents to stop the foster care drift for teens.

The Link provides:

- \*Training necessary to license an individual's home.

- \*24-hour/seven-days-a-week access to crisis intervention and case management services.

- \*Respite Care to stabilize the teen and family when things get rough.

- \*Once-a-month visit from a case manager.

- \*An assessment by a counselor at The Link's center to determine how the teen is functioning on an academic and behavioral level.

- \*Ongoing trainings to help maintain goals and deal with the outcome of the assessment.

For more information, contact Mammel at (269) 927-1422, ext. 144 or e-mail at [mammel@cfsswmi.org](mailto:mammel@cfsswmi.org).

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## Muskegon Chronicle

### District's child-care rates to rise

Tuesday, December 12, 2006

By Teresa Taylor Williams

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Parents will pay higher rates for child care provided by Mona Shores Public Schools as the district seeks ways to make the nearly 10-year-old program sustain itself.

Reduced employee benefits and privatization of the program still are possibilities.

Last month, school officials began investigating ways to cut costs within the Mona Shores Community Child Care program after reporting it operated in the red the past two years.

The school board on Monday decided on some immediate changes that will generate \$31,875 in extra revenue this year, and \$53,750 per year in the future. Effective immediately, the hourly fee will increase by 25 cents an hour to \$5 per hour for infants and toddlers and \$4.45 for school-age children; the number of allowed unpaid vacation weeks for parents will drop from two to one; and unpaid sick days per child will drop from six to four days.

According to Mona Shores Director of Finance Michael Schluentz, there has been a problem with timely record keeping and his office soon will generate monthly reports so school officials can see where the program's finances stand at any given time.

The school board discussed possible cuts in the near future, including saving \$4,000 per year by increasing employees' share of health insurance premiums from 10 percent to 20 percent and eliminating the district's payments to employees -- which total \$47,500 per year -- in lieu of insurance. The district also will consider hiring a private company to run the program, which would save an estimated \$35,000 per year.

Those changes are expected to be voted on by the board Jan. 22.

School officials project the program will run a \$82,500 deficit this year, with \$62,500 of that in indirect costs for custodial and maintenance supplies, electricity, gas, water and snow and trash removal that are provided by the district and billed to the program.

School board members questioned how school officials came up with that figure, saying the amount of indirect costs seemed too high.

The school board ended up reducing the amount of "indirect costs" that the program incurs from 10 percent to 5 percent of the program's revenues.

Most other child-care programs offered through school districts provide retirement benefits but not health insurance for employees. Mona Shores is the exception, offering health benefits to its 25 child-care employees. Muskegon Public Schools and White Lake Area Community Education, which provides child-care services to Montague, North Muskegon, Whitehall and Reeths-Puffer school districts, provide health benefits to coordinators or directors only.

Board Vice President Stuart Jones, who has a child in the Mona Shores child-care program, said it's frustrating that more people don't realize that a quality child-care program costs more money to run.

"We're paying retirement and health insurance, which is not typical of this industry. It's frustrating because parents need to recognize that," Jones said. "They need to see they're sending their child to a high-quality program and it might cost a little more. You can certainly find cheaper child care in town. It's just what you choose."

During public comment, Mary VanderMolen, who teaches at the high school, told the school board many teachers within the district use the child care, and asked they keep that in mind when making decisions.

"I know you have difficult decisions to make," said VanderMolen. "My children have been there five years. It's just a great place to have your child attend, and because of that, I think you've got a better employee. I don't worry with my children there, and I can do my job to the best of my ability."

Board Secretary Jeanne Cooper-Kuiper was the only board member opposed to privatizing the program.

"I'm not in favor of a third party. I don't want anyone operating the child care who's not (part of) our school district," said Cooper-Kuiper. "When we start removing operation of programs from our own folks, it's no longer a Mona Shores program and I'm very concerned about that."

#### OPTIONAL FAXBOX

The following school districts offer child-care programs. All say they are self-sustaining and provide retirement benefits to employees, but health insurance is a rare benefit.

\* Fruitport: 30 district employees, no health benefits.

\* Mona Shores: 11 full-time, 14 part-time district employees, health and retirement benefits.

\* White Lake Area Community Education (provides child-care services to Montague, North Muskegon, Whitehall and Reeths-Puffer school districts): Nine sites, each has a full-time director and three to seven part-time aides. Only directors receive health benefits.

\* Muskegon: Two sites, 12 part-time district employees. Two site coordinators receive health benefits.

\* Oakridge: Seven full- and part-time district employees, no health benefits.

\* Orchard View: Three sites, six full-time and 25 part-time district employees, no health benefits.

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Posted: 12-6-2006

**Migrant workers play significant roles in area counties**

- Oceana tops in migrant populations in area

By KEVIN BRACISZESKI

Daily News Staff Writer

An estimated 3,321 migrant workers labor in Oceana County each year, ranking the county as the second highest among Michigan's 83 counties as far as migrant population is concerned.



"Oceana County would not be able to survive without the migrant population," said Nancy Sterk, director of the Department of Human Services in Oceana and Mason counties. "We are such a crop-oriented county, the whole county revolves around agriculture."

The total number of Oceana County's migrant workers and their family members is 6,503. That number is equal to about 23 percent of the county's estimated population of 28,473.

Oceana County also has an estimated 1,534 people who have worked seasonally in the fields of agriculture, nursery and greenhouse, food processing or reforestation jobs during the past two years, and another estimated 1,620 people who are family members of the non-migrant seasonal workers (including a factor of 2.54 children per family).

The total number of migrant and non-migrant seasonal farm workers and their families is 9,657. The only Michigan county with a higher number is Ottawa County with 11,942.

State estimates for other local counties shows:

- Mason County has a migrant population of 968, a seasonal farm worker population of 317 and a total of 2,547 people who are migrant or seasonal workers and their family members.
- Manistee County has a migrant population of 595, a seasonal farm worker population of 195 and a total of 1,566 people who are migrant or seasonal workers and their family members.
- Lake County has a migrant population of 15, a seasonal farm worker population of five and a total of 40 people who are migrant or seasonal workers and their family members.

One Oceana County company that depends on migrant workers is the Chase Farms food processing plant in the Walkerville area.



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“(They’re) very important. There’s not enough local help to work in the processing plant,” said Lorraine Chase, an owner.

Chase said her company — which processes asparagus, green beans, green zucchini, yellow wax beans, winter squash, butternut squash, carrots, rutabagas and tart cherries — employs about 275 migrant workers and about 60-70 non migrants. The plant’s season begins in May and ends in December, Chase said.

The large population of Spanish-speaking migrant and seasonal workers and their families in Oceana County has led Sterk to hire people who can speak both English and Spanish.

“About half my staff in Oceana County is bilingual,” Sterk said.

That office is also allowed to hire three full-time employees, eight seasonal workers and a manager to work on migrant programs, Sterk said.

“For a small county, Oceana County has a proportionately high staff ratio,” she said.

Since it employs a large number of migrant workers, Chase Farms has a Department of Human Services employee on site to provide services for the workers.

Chase said that arrangement helps her company because employees previously would take days off work to visit the local DHS office. Chase said there is also a Michigan Migrant Health office at her plant, as well as a Head Start preschool program for workers’ families.

She said the Head Start program has a capacity of 60 children and is also open to other area families.

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## Post a Comment

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Published December 12, 2006

## Former Zwick aide pleads guilty in fraud case

From Staff Reports

GRAND RAPIDS - A woman who admitted helping Eaton County's former probate court guardian steal \$1.5 million from elderly and disabled clients pleaded guilty Monday to two federal counts of fraud.

### What's next

- Kathy L. VanDerske of Portland pleaded guilty to two federal counts of fraud and faces five years in prison on each. A sentencing date has not been set.
- Charles M. Zwick will appear in federal court Wednesday where he is expected to plead guilty to federal fraud charges.

Kathy L. VanDerske, 55, of Portland - the former law office manager for Charles M. Zwick of Charlotte - faces five years in prison on each felony. She and Zwick stole the money during a five-year period from about 100 of Zwick's clients, according to federal authorities.

Those funds included Social Security payments and other assets. A sentencing date has not been set.

Zwick also faces two federal felony counts of fraud. He will appear Wednesday in court and also is expected to plead guilty.

VanDerske conspired with Zwick to use the money to pay law firm expenses, to cover the money stolen from estates, to give to family and friends, and to cover casino gambling expenses, assistant U.S. Attorney Tom Gezon said.

"She was robbing Peter to pay Paul in ever increasing amounts," Gezon said.

VanDerske, who is free on bond, admitted to hiding the money she was taking by under-reporting the assets on disclosures required to be made in Eaton County Probate Court. She worked for Zwick for 14 years and also was a former employee of Eaton County court.

A phone listing for VanDerske was disconnected. Her attorney, Daniel Fagan, did not wish to comment on specifics of the case while it is ongoing.

In addition to prison time, VanDerske's sentence could include a fine of \$250,000 or twice the amount stolen. As outlined in the 10-page plea agreement signed by VanDerske and her attorney, she also will have to pay full restitution to victims.

Zwick was named guardian for Eaton County Probate Court in 1984. He was fired in August 2005 after he failed to show up for hearings in probate court to explain what happened to more than \$630,000 belonging to the estates of two elderly women.

After local police could not find him, a bench warrant was issued and he was eventually arrested in St. Joseph.

He served 60 days in jail and paid fines on two counts of criminal contempt of court while the federal investigation continued.

Assistant News and Information Desk Editor Jason Cody and Lansing Community Newspapers Editor Kurt Madden contributed to this report.

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Salvation Army helps 150 families a year

By JOHN EBY / Dowagiac Daily News  
*Monday, December 11, 2006 10:09 AM EST*

Cass County Salvation Army/CURE (Churches United to Relieve Emergencies) helps more than 150 families each year from its base at the Federated Church, 202 Center St.

Rev. Paul Lance was pastor when the arrangement began in 1985 so there would be a central location for people who needed emergency assistance with shelter, utilities, prescriptions, food and gasoline.

Before 1985, people in need went from church to church. Some received a helping hand from multiple churches, while others were denied assistance when funds were depleted for that month.

Besides churches, funding comes through Encore Dance, the Edward Lowe Foundation, the SWAssn. UCC Society Comm., Dowagiac Ministerial Association, United Way, FEMA, St. Denys Foundation, CROP Walk and individual contributions.

Local Salvation Army work is carried on with little fanfare.

Four days a week (Monday-Thursday, 1-3 p.m., no appointment necessary), September through June, a handful of volunteers aided by a church secretary, share the work of CURE. Anyone interested in volunteering should call 782-2631.

Judy Bogen and Pat Ward were among original volunteers. However, the need was so great that they recruited additional volunteers. At present they have five, including the church secretary.

The Federated Church donates office space and the use of office equipment.

The Salvation Army/CURE work closely with the state Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Southwestern Michigan Community Action Agency (SMCAA) to meet emergency needs without depleting all of their funds, and with First Christian Church for its "Feed My Sheep" food pantry and St. Vincent DePaul Society for clothing and food.

Donations made to the Salvation Army of Cass County stay in this county and only help Cass residents.

Felpausch Food Center graciously allowed the Salvation Army to set up outside its store on M-51 South.

Silver Creek United Methodist Church has provided bell ringers for the past two years, however, they need and welcome anyone wishing to participate. Call 782-3098.

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December 12, 2006

**Editorial**

## **Adopt time limits for welfare benefits**

### **Bills would end payments after five years**

Times are hard, and it's understandable that people want to help struggling families. But temporary assistance that turns into a lifetime of dependency does no favors for anyone.

Michigan has made a lot of strides toward ending the culture of welfare dependency. It has eliminated General Assistance or welfare for able-bodied adults. And it has instituted work and education requirements for heads of households who are recipients of welfare.

But the state has not taken the final step, like many other states, and placed a lifetime limit on the receipt of welfare benefits.

It should.

Certainly, the welfare rolls have thinned under various reforms instituted by former Gov. John Engler and reinforced for all the states by the federal Welfare Reform Act of 1996.

Michigan's current caseload stands at 88,133, down from its peak in the early 1980s at 241,157. The cases include families, so the current caseload covers about 239,000 people, including children.

In recent years, the average monthly caseload has been inching up, due to the state's prolonged recession. In 2001, the average caseload was 69,543.

Steps taken in the 1990s to cut down on the welfare caseload included requirements that beneficiaries take training and search for jobs. But many other states have added absolute time limits to the receipt of welfare benefits. Michigan is the only Great Lakes region state to have open-ended benefits, according to a survey by the staff of the sponsor of one of the bills, state Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood.

The legislative package would limit benefits to 48 months. But recipients could get a 12-month extension for a lifetime total of 60 months.

Other provisions in the legislation exclude the disabled, the mentally ill and certain others who would likely be unable to support themselves from the limit.

And the package of bills contains what are called "clock stoppers," or provisions that would stop the clock from running on the benefits limit for various problems or setbacks encountered by recipients. These exemptions include an unemployment rate in the county where a recipient resides of 9 percent or more.

That's reasonable, given that leaving the welfare rolls requires finding gainful employment.

When Engler began his reforms, he was met with scorn and derision. But the numbers tell the story. The current caseload, after five years of recession, is about a third of what it was for most of the 1980s, when the state and nation enjoyed economic growth.

Other states have adopted reforms similar to the ones now in the Legislature. When the bills are passed, Gov. Jennifer Granholm ought to sign them.

### **Early finding on time limits**

"States with strict or moderate penalties for not working consistently show higher income gains among poor children throughout the income distribution than do states with lenient penalties."

*Source: Rebecca Blank and Robert Schoeni, University of Michigan, 2003*

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MARIANNE UDOW  
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## News Release

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### **W.J. Maxey hosts annual holiday dinner theater** *Production showcases culinary arts and theaters arts programs at juvenile facility*

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**December 11, 2006**

WHITMORE LAKE – The holiday annual dinner theater production of “The Christmas Truce” will be held at 6 p.m., Friday, December 15 at W.J. Maxey Boys Training School near Whitmore Lake.

“The skills of the students in our culinary and theater arts program will be on display for the community to see,” said Derek Hitchcock, facility director.

The play “The Christmas Truce” tells the story of a negotiated peace for Christmas day in the midst of World War I in 1914. The dinner menu includes mixed green salad, roasted top round of beef, broiled coho salmon, baked potato, buttered green beans and carrots and rolls. An assorted of beverages also will be available.

Cost is \$15 per person or \$25 for a couple. To make reservations, call 734-449-3298. All proceeds from the holiday dinner theater go to the Maxey Citizens Advisory Council.

The W.J. Maxey Boys Training School provides a safe and secure environment for therapeutic treatment of juvenile offenders between the ages of 12 and 21. It is located at 9306 E. M-36 near Whitmore Lake.

For more information go to [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs)